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ABSTRACT

The major articles in this journal issue deal with various aspects of young adult literature. Specific topics covered in the articles are (1) questions worth asking students about young adult novels, (2) the five major functions of adolescent literature in high school literature programs, (3) Southwestern literature for adolescents, (4) teaching literature of the Southwest to high school students, and (5) an approach to motivating adolescents to read. Other features of this issue are reviews of other resources that focus on adolescent literature and an interview with Elmer Kelton, a Texas writer. (RL)

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TEJAS

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Young Adult Literature

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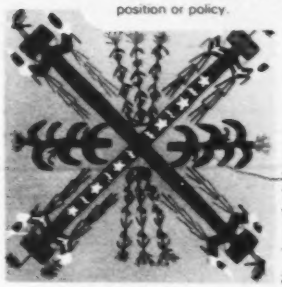

Navajo sandpainting

Why do we not recognize the inherent creativity of the mind of humankind? It will "flame out/Like shining from shook foil" (to quote Gerard Manley Hopkins). Even among the uneducated, the urge to create finds expression in some art form. The peoples of the world have always recorded their experience in whatever medium is available. The Navajos use colored sand;

Huichol yarn painting

the Huicholes of Mexico make paintings with bits of string and yarn.

Students are creators, too. They may not create any lasting artifacts, but they could, and should, be able to bring their creative minds to bear on others' artifacts.

A work of fiction, for example, depends for its success on a harmonious relationship between

Huichol yarn painting

creative author and creative reader. The "good" author provides signs to lure the reader on from one page to another; the "good" reader uses the signs as raw materials to create alternatives, solutions, and perceptions that will give human meanings to the human acts within those pages. The work of fiction is a sterile thing until the readers bring their inherent creativity to bear upon it. Reading must be a common ground where writer's mindset and reader's perceptions meet.

About the cover: the Navajo sandpainting celebrates the sun, giver of light and preserver of life. The design and colors are of religious significance. "Whirling Logs," above, is another Navajo creation, telling a story of flood in the twelfth century.

The two photographs of yarn paintings record the pilgrimage of the Huicholes to Wirikuta, their Eden, where they gather peyote for their religious rituals.

These examples of primitive art remind us of Matthew Arnold's statement that art forms are the common ground where the minds of people meet.

CS 206708

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Questions Worth Asking Students About Young Adult Novels

"Intelligently framed questions have the potential to teach young adults more about the richness of literature than any number of lectures on theme, plot, and characterization."

Is the book realistic? It's a question too often asked by teachers and the simplistic yes or no student response is too often used to damn or praise a book. Such an approach to the criticism of young adult fiction is not limited to the classroom and is used by some professional critics in the field as well. A recent article on *The Chocolate War* condemns the book and its author for portraying only the brutal and dark side of life (Bagnall 1980). Realism, Bagnall argues, is "an honest attempt to picture people and events as they really are" (p. 214). To her, *The Chocolate War* is not realistic.

A review of Robert Newton Peck's *Clunie* criticizes the book because it does not have a realistic picture of a mentally retarded child and it is filled with characters who lack realism. My own students in Young Adult literature classes dismiss books because "They really couldn't happen" or "I've never met anyone like that before." All of this emphasis on what is real bothers me. If realism is defined as "simply fidelity to actuality" (Thrall, p. 397) then some of the above criticism is justifiable but, I think, rather narrow and simplistic. William Dean Howells, the great standard bearer of realism defined it as "the truthful treatment of material" (Thrall, p. 397). This definition has a slightly different twist from the previous one. Here the definition is rightly tied up with the author's view of the world and what he perceives as truthful. Over and over again Robert Cormier has said that the world he portrays in his books is one he perceives as real.

There is something happening in a growing number of YA novels that's pushing the old "fidelity" definition of realism in new directions. To be accurate in our appraisal of these new novels I think we need to ask some other questions that go beyond the yes or no response to the realism question. If we take Cormier as the starting point, all three of his YA novels have a sense of the unreal about them. I can picture Jerry Renault on the football field as the story begins. As I get deeper into the novel, however, there's an evil blackness that starts to cover the school and surround the characters. It is an unreal quality that covers characters playing out a series of real actions. *I Am the Cheese* has a similar quality. On the first page I see Adam bicycling. That's real to me, but as the book continues, a surrealistic cloud starts to hover over everything. I can, and do, follow the character with great interest but I'm no longer sure what is real and what is imagined. *After the First Death* continues this unrealistic quality meshed with realism. As G. Robert Carlsen has said, these books create "a universe that is not quite real. It is this quality that perhaps so horrifies some readers who are imprinted with realism as their literary criterion" (p. 8).

This new trend is not just a Cormier trait. Zindel's *Confessions of a Teenage Baboon* and *Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eyeball!* have similar traits. All the characters in *Confessions* have an unfamiliar quality to them. Lloyd Dipardi is a tormented, adult alcoholic who has strange relationships with equally strange teenagers. Chris lives in this strange home with a mother who forces him to urinate in a milk bottle. Lloyd struggles to change Chris so that he won't turn out as Dipardi has. Eventually Lloyd commits suicide as Chris watches. It's realistic in that man and woman act out life situations but simple fidelity to actuality it is not. How about *Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eyeball!*? There's a character named Marsh Mellow, a girl named Edna Shinglebox, a dead father in an urn, a raccoon at a bizarre party, an alcoholic mother, and John Kennedy's grave. Is this an honest attempt to present things as they really are? I don't think so but yet the novel works very well.

Felice Holman's *Slake's Limbo* is, perhaps, the classic case here. The reader can picture the reality of Slake's tough neighborhood and the boys who pick on him and beat him up. When Aremis goes to live in his subway cave, there is plenty of detail, like rats and newspapers, to create a semblance of the real world but there is an unreal universe under the streets of New York. It is unreality masked in reality. The list of such books goes on and includes some of the work of M.E. Kerr and Richard Peck just to name two.

The central question is how to handle these novels from a critical standpoint. We can take the authors to task for not depicting people and events as they really are. We can argue that these books have too much that is unreal to be good realism or too much that is real to be good fantasy but the fact is, these are good books and popular with teen-

agers. I would submit that the question of whether or not these books are real be changed to — *Are the emotions of the characters real*? That is, given these sets of circumstances, is it logical/plausible that the character would act and feel this way? Somehow the answer to whether or not Slake really could live in a subway cave dwarfs when compared to — Given Artemis' circumstances, is his emotional reaction to the man in the turban hat a realistic one? In many ways this is a very response centered question for students. Not only must they consider the events of the story, but they must also consider their own emotions in deciding the answer to the question.

Nina Bawden does a wonderful job of tackling this issue of credible emotions in her article "Emotional Realism in Books for Young People." Although she focuses on fiction for children, her argument is valid for all literature. When Bawden was nine her grandfather died. She recalls flinging herself on her bed and crying then looking up to observe her tear stained face in the mirror feeling somewhat pleased at the way she looked as she expressed her grief. When she ran downstairs to ask her mother if she could attend her grandfather's funeral, she was angered to be told no. "On the one level I was still genuinely distressed, but on another, I wanted to go the funeral so that everyone would see and admire my sad, pale face" (p. 32). With that experience recounted, Bawden goes on to show how Tolstoy rekindled those feelings years later with some emotionally realistic writing.

> Several years later, when I was thirteen or so, I read Tolstoy's *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*. As you all certainly know, there is a wonderful description in the book of the feelings of the young narrator at his mother's funeral. First he feels real, spontaneous grief and admiration at the way he is expressing it; then sadness because he does not feel it any longer. I recognized myself, my own childish experience, in this honest account and was moved and consoled by it; and it still seems to me one of the most striking examples I know of emotional realism. A giant among novelists, remembering exactly how he had felt on this unhappy occasion and setting it down without slurring or evading or sentimentalizing. It delighted and astonished me at the time — how did this man, Leo Tolstoy, know how I had felt when my grandfather died? — and it excites my admiration now. Honesty about what goes on inside one's head is harder to achieve than truthful observation of external facts. (Bawden, p. 32)

In Bawden's argument, it is the character's credible emotion that is the essence of realism. This emphasis on emotional realism seems a much more fruitful approach to studying some of the new YA novels. Are the emotions of the characters real? That question seems more accurate, more thought provoking, and fairer to the authors and their works.

This whole issue of what question English teachers ask students about YA books is an important one too seldom dealt with. I suspect no teacher who reads the professional journals has escaped reading at least one article on questioning strategies in which the author berates educators for asking too many fact questions and not enough higher level questions. Research on what goes on in the classroom certainly argues that the message in such an article needs to be continually sounded. Somehow though, it seems to me that we need to go beyond the general message. Are there general kinds of higher level questions that English teachers can use in discussing YA novels with teenagers? The answer is yes. Such questions do exist and they provide an exciting key to help students unlock the riches found in many YA novels.

One of my favorite sets of questions was developed by popular, YA novelist Richard Peck. One of the reasons that Peck's questions are so good is that they recognize that today's teenagers are products of a media saturated culture. He cleverly uses movie and television question to get youngsters to look more closely at books but also to look more closely at TV and movies as well. Here are Peck's "Ten Questions to Ask about a Novel."

1. What would this story be like if the main character were of the opposite sex?
2. Why is the story set where it is (not *What* is the setting)?
3. If you were to film this story, what characters would you eliminate if you couldn't use them all?
4. Would you film this story in black and white or in color?
5. How is the main character different from you?
6. Why or why not would this story make a good TV series?
7. What's one thing in this story that's happened to you?
8. Reread the first paragraph of Chapter 1. What's in it that makes you read on?
9. If you had to design a new cover for this book, what would it look like?
10. What does the title tell you about the book? Does it tell the truth? (Peck, pp. 1 and 7)

Each one of Peck's ten questions has what he calls an ulterior motive to go with it. It's really an explanation of what he's trying to get at with each question. While space doesn't permit me to detail each of his motives, I will mention a couple and commend the entire article to you.

Question #3 is a popular one with teenagers and an important one from an English teacher's standpoint. Peck's point here is to get adolescents to look at how rich with characters a novel can be and how TV shows must often be simplified and in that simplification the richness of the novel is lost. I have had the most success with question #4. It's amazing how all of us can quickly respond to whether or not a particular book should be filmed in black and white or in color. It is the analysis of the response here that is the most interesting part of the question. Why should *Slake's Limbo* be filmed in black and white while *There's a Bat in Bunk Five* could only be color? This analysis gets teen readers to work with the question of tone in a novel. Question #8 is a writing teacher's dream. How often do we tell youngsters that the first paragraph must be a grabber? Here's a chance for students to see if professional writers do what the teacher says should be done. I offer the first paragraph of Cormier's *The Chocolate War* as a fine example of an introduction that makes you read on. Cormier writes:

> They murdered him.
>
> As he turned to take the ball, a dam burst against the side of his head and a hand grenade shattered his stomach. Engulfed by nausea, he pitched toward the grass. His mouth encountered gravel, and he spat frantically, afraid that some of his teeth had been knocked out. Rising to his feet, he saw the field through drifting gauze but held on until everything settled into place, like a lens focusing, making the world sharp again, with edges. (Cormier 1974, p. 7)

A rather unique way of looking at a novel is suggested by Donelson and Nilsen in *Literature for Today's Young Adults*. It involves the use of semantic differentials and is a real help for English teachers and students because it helps to focus attention on just a few aspects of a novel. Students must fill out the form prior to class discussion. In order to decide and be able to defend how essential they believe the setting of a given book to be, students must go back, think about, and examine the novel again. With the completed form in front of them, students tend to be more focused in their class comments and they tend to defend those comments in a more response centered way. The semantic differential that follows is for T. Degens' novel *Transport 7-41-R*.

Transport 7-41-R

The setting in this story was:

essential —+—+—+—+— irrelevant
unusual —+—+—+—+— typical
the most interesting part —+—+—+—+— the least interesting part

The plot was:

funny —+—+—+—+— sad
exciting —+—+—+—+— dull
believable —+—+—+—+— unbelievable

The feeling I was left with was:

sadness —+—+—+—+— happiness
disgust —+—+—+—+— admiration
excitement —+—+—+—+— boredom

(Donelson and Nilsen, p. 375)

This form gives the teacher the flexibility to periodically change the literary elements looked at or, if a novel is particularly strong in, perhaps, theme or characterization, semantic differentials can be developed that channel students to look in depth at those strong aspects of the book.

The final questioning strategy I'd like to mention was developed almost thirty years ago. The developer, Edward J. Gordon, presented his questioning scheme at the NCTE convention in 1954. In many ways it sounds like the general questioning strategy article I mentioned earlier. The difference is that Gordon applied his levels of questions specifically to literature. He proposed five levels of questions. The first level involves the student's ability to remember a fact. What was the name of Wren's brother in Bridger's novel *Notes for Another Life*?

The second level centers around a student's ability to prove or disprove a generalization someone else has made. Look at these two reviews of the same novel:

Notes for Another Life, Sue Ellen Bridgers. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981, 210 pp., $8.95. Jr. high and up.

Home Before Dark and *All Together Now* quickly established Bridgers' reputation in the YA field and *Notes for Another Life* puts her at the head of the pack. In this latest novel, Bridgers introduces us to thirteen-year-old Wren and her older brother, Kevin. They live with their grandparents because their father is in and out of the state mental hospital. Their mother after years of living with the ups and downs of a mentally ill husband, has chosen a career of high fashion and city life over Wren and Kevin.

Once again it is Bridgers' fine sense of characterization that makes her book work so well. The reader watches Kevin and Wren struggle with developmental tasks made more complicated by mental illness in the family and absent parents.

The author beautifully balances the father's retreat from reality with what appears to be a similar journey by Kevin. Kevin's moodiness, his lack of friends, and his perceived rejection by his mother and his girlfriend push him to a suicide attempt. The family comes together to help Kevin and to deal, this time successfully, with yet another tragedy.

Running through this finely crafted novel is the theme of the soothing power of music, which is an ointment to ease the pain, an escape, and an old friend to lean on for help and strength. It is music that provides notes for another life. Because *Notes* is not as demanding as *Ordinary People* nor as simplistic as *Lisa Bright and Dark*, this fine novel will get a bigger share of teenage readers (Abrahamson, p. 75).

Bridgers, Sue Ellen. *Notes for Another Life*. 250p. CIP. Knopf. Oct. 1981. PSm (cl,sp.) $8.95. ISBN 0-394-84889-6; PLB $8.99.

Gr 7 up —Thirteen-year-old Wren and 16-year-old Kevin have lived with their grandparents for six years, ever since their beautiful mother left town to pursue a career. Their father, subject to recurrent bouts of mental illness, improves during the course of the story, briefly rejoins the family and returns to the hospital again. In between, Wren is courted by Sam, who dreams of a happy, secure marriage like his parents'. Kevin, on the other hand, almost loses Melanie, a buoyant girl who hangs in there (inconceivably) during his back-to-back emotional crises: Kevin neglects his homework, plays savage tennis, weeps frequently over his parents' situations and tries suicide. The blurb suggests that this is "a family chronicle for all ages." It would have been more accurate to describe it as a propaganda vehicle for female domesticity. Good women subordinate their talents and yearnings to the home and their children; all other paths lead to havoc. For a riveting story of four deserted children, lead readers instead to Cynthia Voight's marvelous upbeat *Homecoming* (Atheneum, 1981) (French, p. 133).

Students should be asked to decide which review they think is more accurate or perhaps they feel that both of us missed the point. This type of exercise is a lesson in the difficulties of reviewing and the prejudice each reviewer brings to the task. It's also a good introduction to YA reviewing sources. The people who should be reading YA novel reviews and writing their own are the teenagers themselves.

The third level looks at the student's ability to make his own generalization. Assuming a student has not read the reviews just presented, a question at this level on the Bridgers' book might involve music. What role does music play both in the novel itself and in the title *Notes for Another Life*? Level four is closely allied to three. It involves the ability to generalize from the book to application in life. What is the problem faced by Wren and Kevin that must ultimately be faced by each of us?

The final level of questioning concerns the ability to carry over the generalization into one's own life and behavior. If the theme of the book is that we need to really listen to each other more, does the reader make an effort in his own life to listen to others more as a result of the literary experience? (Gordon 1955, pp. 330-334)

So we come full circle. Is the book realistic? Given today's YA novels that question needs to be used less frequently and often replaced with: Are the emotions of the character real? Sets of questions like Peck's, levels of questions like Gordon's, and semantic differentials like Donelson and Nilsen's are techniques worth using. Intelligently framed questions have the potential to teach young adults more about the richness of literature than any number of lectures on theme, plot, and characterization.

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Literature for Today's Young Adults: A Book Too Good to Miss

English Journal runs a column that focuses each month on one book too good to miss. It seems appropriate in this issue of *English in Texas* devoted to young adult literature that we highlight a textbook on the subject that is too good to miss: *Literature for Today's Young Adults* by Ken Donelson and Alleen Nilsen. The book was published in 1980 by Scott, Foresman and is, in this writer's view, the most important book on young adult literature since G. Robert Carlsen published *Books and the Teen-age Reader* in 1967.

In 1977, Donelson and Nilsen surveyed teachers of YA literature courses across the country. Overwhelmingly what the respondents said we needed was a scholarly, readable textbook on YA literature that included history and background of the field. The book answers this need and more. Many teachers and professors will use the book to sway skeptical colleagues into finally understanding what many of us already know: the field of young adult literature is not only a legitimate one but also one of the most exciting areas of literature to be working in. While the book is thoroughly grounded in scholarship, it is first and foremost a pleasure to read whether you are an English teacher, a librarian, or a college professor.

Literature for Today's Young Adults is divided into four parts. The first part, "Understanding Young Adults and Books," looks at who and what the teenager is, what teenagers read, and the literary aspects of YA books. A good part of the first chapter is devoted to exploding some myths about YA books. The authors attack the myth that today's teenagers can't read, that YA books are all the same, that they are only written for youngsters with low reading skills, and that YA books are less enduring than adult books. All of these notions hover over YA books and Donelson and Nilsen nicely show how wrong the notions are. Chapter two on literary elements is especially important to junior and senior high school English teachers. Using scores of YA novels, the authors show how authors of YA books handle everything from theme, to plot, to characterization, to figurative language. What is obvious very early in the text is that YA books have all the mechanical, literary elements that are so often talked about when classics are dissected. The difference is that YA books also offer reading motivation for teenagers.

"A Brief History of Young Adult Reading" is the second part of the book. It's a very important part and offers all of us a chance to look at where young adult books came from. Too many people believe adolescent literature began with the publication of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* or, perhaps, Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer*. Donelson and Nilsen bring us back to 1800 and take us on an enjoyable journey through the dime novels to the works of Horatio Alger, from Edward Stratemeyer and his series books to comic books and pulp magazines, and then on into the 1950's and 60's with a look at some fine writers like John Tunis, Mary Stolz, and Esther Forbes. The significance and the scholarship of this history section cannot be overlooked. No other book available has boiled down the history of juvenile books with an eye on the evolution of books for teenagers. In a recent national survey I did of how young adult literature was taught in colleges across the country, one professor wrote, "I've always wanted to tell my students about the development of adolescent literature but I could never find a book to help me. Now I've got Donelson and Nilsen. What a find!"

Most readers will find the third part of the text, "Modern Young Adult Reading," the heart of *Literature for Today's Young Adults*. The six chapters in this section look at realism, romanticism, science fiction and fantasy, heroes, and informational books. Each chapter includes a fine list of recommended books and, even more important, a list of suggestions for evaluating each kind of book discussed. The list of books and suggestions for evaluation alone are worth the price of the book.

The chapters in this third section that deal with romanticism and heroes are worth a special look given current YA book publishing trends. Donelson and Nilsen look at the love-romance and discuss characteristics of these books, who reads them, and why. Professionals working with young adults today need to pay special attention to this chapter. If there is a trend in YA book publishing at the moment it involves YA teen romances. Building on the popularity of such books with adult readers, Bantam now publishes Sweet Dreams romances for teenagers while Scholastic has Wildfire and Wishing Star books and Silhouette has First Love romances, and teenagers are buying these books by the millions.

The chapter on heroes shows that not all YA books are depressing novels peopled with despicable adults. Indeed, the opposite is true here. The authors look at why teenagers need heroes, who they tell us their heroes are, and what YA books provide heroes. Maybe it's the climate of the times or maybe it's a reaction to previously published YA books but, I see more and more new books that provide reading teenagers with life models or "quiet heroes" as Donelson and Nilsen call them. These are stories about people who are worth admiring, who show us how great the human potential is, but who will probably never appear on Phil Donahue or Merv Griffin. Such characters as the priest in *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* and the father in *A Day No Pigs Would Die* are the quiet heroes who make us all proud to be part of the human race.

The last part of the Donelson/Nilsen book looks at using and promoting books with teenagers, issues and concerns for adults, and the people behind the books. The using and promoting books chapter will be of practical importance to teachers and librarians. The authors discuss ways of using YA books and motivating reading in the English class, reading class, library, and social studies class. This chapter covers everything from how to do a book talk to how to teach social studies through historical fiction. The issues for adults chapter focuses on ethnic books, paperbacks, movies and TV, sex, censorship, and the evaluation of books.

"The People Behind the Books" is the last chapter of the text. It is a collection of responses from YA book editors, promotion people, and authors. These people were asked to describe what they see as the future of their work and the future of the YA literature field as a whole. Teachers and students alike will take pleasure in reading what Robert Cormier, S.E. Hinton, M.E. Kerr, Robert Lipsyte, Richard Peck, Paul Zindel, and others had to say about their own work and the future of YA literature. Here's a fine ending to a fine book.

In summary, I repeat what I said earlier. *Literature for Today's Young Adults* is the most important book to be published in the YA field since *Books and the Teen-age Reader*. It is already the most used textbook in college courses on young adult literature. This book will be to YA literature what the Sutherland/Arbuthnot and Huck texts are to children's literature—the standard reference in the field. I once said I wished I had written this book. I still do but I couldn't have. Donelson and Nilsen have spent years in the YA field writing, reading, and synthesizing. Their text is the culmination of all that work. In the introduction to the book they write, "We feel no sorrow, but rather joy, in spending our lives working in a world of literature that is always changing, exciting, and alive." I've always felt that same joy. *Literature for Today's Young Adults* contributes to that joy.

Michael Angelotti
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Uses of Young Adult Literature in the Eighties,

or Life in a Quiet Pond Ain't the Same After a Stone is Thrown

Writing about literature written for young people immediately poses two problems: what to call it and how to define it. Naming is important because names have connotations, connotations affect attitudes, and attitudes affect behavior. "Juvenile" and "teenage," for example, are dated, suggest a lesser or more stereotyped literature than exists today, and incline neither professionals nor lay people to consider it seriously as literature. "Adolescent," although a much more frequently used term by professionals, also carried a negative bias because it tends to create images of pimples, irresponsibility, and psychological aberration. It stereotypes young people as something less than what they are and that attitude is carried to the literature written for and about them. "Young Adult," probably the most acceptable term of the moment, projects a more positive image of young people, although it is difficult to imagine a twelve or thirteen-year-old as a "young adult." There *is* an inherent contradiction in the use of that term when it refers to human beings neither physically nor psychologically mature. Also, when it refers to a kind of literature, it has meant literature for older adolescents or adolescent literature or any work "freely chosen for reading by persons between the ages of twelve and twenty."[1] Thus, "young adult" has a certain undesirable ambiguity of meaning. "Youth literature" would seem a most appropriate term in both its acceptability to young people and its narrowness of definition, but it is not in common use.

Without question, a confusion in meaning is possible among communicators on the subject of literature for young people simply by the descriptor chosen and connotations associated with it. It can, at the least, mean a lesser (and often lower quality literature) directed to remedial students or, at best, a high quality transitional literature of value to any reader. Alleen Nilsen,[2] Kenneth Donelson and Alleen Nilsen,[3] Shelia Swartz,[4] among other writers, have also discussed this communication problem, but in this article, I will use the various terms interchangeably to mean a literature written for and about young people of about junior or senior high school age, of easier readability and less complex literary form than adult literature. *The Outsiders*,[5] *The Chocolate War*,[6] and *Forever*[7] are examples of youth literature. *A Separate Peace*[8] and *The Catcher in the Rye*[9] are examples of adult literature that have captured the fancy of young people and educators of young people but are not technically adolescent literature because their intended audiences were not specifically young adult and they feature certain complexities of form more common to adult literature. Splitting hairs makes little difference to the classroom teacher more concerned with involvement than labelling and definition, but there are implications for the field in general to the degree that publishers and literary critics who greatly influence definition and recognition of literary art forms also influence its credibility. Credibility, on the other hand, influences the vulnerability of a literature or a work to censorship, a threat which seems to shroud the entire body of YA literature, although most works should be no more censorable than traditional school literature. That a work is adolescent literature removes it from the cloak of respectability automatically accorded much "classic" or traditional school literature. "Quality" in the case of a classic is almost mystically assumed, whereas young adult literature must prove itself every time. Ironically, of course, most books today are removed from school shelves for their language (profanity) and subject matter (sex, church, politics), not their lack of quality.

For example, a few years back my junior high English department decided to teach Patricia Dizenzo's *Phoebe*,[10] an adolescent novel about a fifteen-year-old's attempts to deal with pregnancy. There is not a mention of sex ever happening in the book, nor is there a profane word used. The book simply attempts to realistically portray the options open to one pregnant teenager. We assigned the book to our eighth grade classes and two parents telephoned the principal shortly thereafter. In brief, the assignment stood, the two students were offered alternative books, and the parents were invited to watch a film of the book to be shown the following Monday. They declined, their children attended, the matter was closed. I discovered later that the children were disappointed in the film, reported same to their parents, who were pleased enough, therefore, to bother us no more. The film, incidentally, is well done and even less explicit than the book. Not all censorship stories end so happily ever after.

Although we are not quite to the point of screaming mobs, book burnings (with some notable exceptions), and tar and feathers, pressure groups are succeeding in removing particular books from classroom, library, and bookstore shelves in many parts of the nation. It does not take long for one or two citizens or groups to create creeping hysteria in a school district. One book censored in one school or library becomes a stone cast into a quiet pond, scattering every living thing pell-mell, causing pervasive psychic trauma among them. Ripples that break the glassy surface finally touch every inch of shoreline and things are never again the same. And so it is among us. Fear pervades bookgivers, and guilt settles in as we hold back, cross out, refuse, lock up, and hide good books for no good reason. Well, there is one good reason when it comes down to it, the paycheck. But my purpose in this writing is really not to address censorship (or its frequent euphemism, book selection) nor faintheartedness nor virtues of martyrdom and ethics versus comforts of lucre and three squares a day. Another defensive argument in support of YA literature in the classroom would be redundant. What might be helpful, however, is a reasonably objective analysis, pro and con, of its potential for schools of the 1980s.

The present reality of literature teaching and librarianship is for many practi-

tioners a quiet war. Pressures of censorship, economics, accountability, and a number of other forces are conspiring to immobilize teacher choice and creativity. In order to teach appropriate content using methods consistent with individual expertise and philosophy, external demands must be confronted and, to some degree, either ignored or subverted or both. Teaching literature today can be risky business! Of course, another response to these pressures is to teach or circulate only "safe" works: classic, conventional, anthologized. We can all do that indefinitely, knowing in advance that an unfortunately large percentage of our students may tolerate such literature, but can't or won't *experience* it, nor *respond* in any meaningful way to what amounts to a collection of literature written for adults or children or adolescents who seldom exist in the real world. For them, we can predict with appalling accuracy who will fail — even before the reading, before the discussion, before the test. Why is it that so many students do not value literature study? Is the problem that we improperly select safe literature or that we don't know *how* to teach literature to most teenagers or that literature is not appropriate school content for most students or that we are unrealistic in assuming that more than a small minority of human beings in a free society will choose to read literature or that most of our students need at some time an alternative literature to that conventionally taught? Answers are not easy to come by and any one of the possibilities listed would make a provocative thesis for study. As noted earlier, however, this paper will focus on the final one, some possible functions of young adult literature, as an alternative literature in a very unsettled pond.

Most of the arguments for and against the use of adolescent literature in school literature programs seem to cluster around five major functions: transitional, recreational, therapeutic, supplemental, and remedial.

TRANSITIONAL. Many students are not experientially ready to meet adult literature at the precise moment of entering the seventh grade because its universal themes, subject matter, language, and formal attributes were written by sophisticated adult writers for a sophisticated adult reading audience with the intention of enlightening or entertaining *them*. Plainly, a certain amount of living as an adult is necessary before a deeper understanding of adult life is possible. Thus, the universal adult themes in Hemingway, Steinbeck, and much of Twain are too abstract for most young people to vicariously experience and respond to except in a most superficial way. Adapting adult literature to accommodate adolescent reading abilities so empties it of meaning that reading becomes a mechanical exercise and sensitive response an unrealistic expectation. Students learn much about doing assignments and little about appreciating literature or understanding life.

For example, *A Christmas Carol* is common junior high school fare, but surely Charles Dickens did not intend it to be a cute Christmas story for toddlers or teens. It has, however, been reduced to such by the simplistic films of Disney and filmstrips of educational media *because* the author's text requires life experiences and abstract thinking abilities that have not yet happened to the junior high audience. Readability, in effect, has been reduced to reading abilities until the essential, intended meaning of the author is impossible to achieve. How many junior high schoolers can read *A Christmas Carol* independently, can sense the social protest, marvel at the figurative language, perceive the caricature, enjoy the book as a reading experience? How many never return to the work again because it is for children only? Students need a literature that they can experience fully and from which a good measure of satisfaction is possible. Because adolescent literature offers variety in subject matter and a range of linguistic and literary complexity, it can bridge the gap between children's literature and adult literature for many students, allowing for continuous growth in literary sophistication and in positive attitudes about reading literature. Adult classics should be read and studied when students are able to reasonably experience them.

Another dimension of "transition" for young people is a recognition of the role of form in understanding and enjoying literature, and concomitant with that perceptual shift, an acceptance of longer works as readable. Most of the elements of adult literature are treated to some degree in adolescent literature, often more obviously. Thus, young adult literature can be a readiness for or an introduction to a more complex adult work of similar content or form. Because it is not as formidable in length, it can also bridge short story and adult novel for adolescents threatened by sheer bulk.

Opponents of young adult literature claim that there is no hard data to support the notion that youth literature lends to any transition, nor that such a transition is necessary, nor that reading adolescent literature at an early age positively affects the reading of classics later. In effect, adolescent literature may only delay entry into adult literature. They have a point. The evidence is largely circumstantial, based on survey and interview techniques, and is inferential, drawn from analogies between literary growth and theories of human growth as posited by Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, and others. One might ask, of course, what hard data there is to support the reading of classics by adolescents. In any case, one needs to match young adult literature and school use as carefully as one would select adult literature. No literature is perfect for everyone, and the negative effects of forced reading of the wrong literature is just as relevant to YA literature as it is to adult literature.

Another aspect of the opposition argument is the claim that YA books are of such meager literary quality that little growth is possible. Some are, of course, of poor quality by any adult standard, although it can be argued that literary growth is relative to the reader's level of literary sophistication. To some, moving from one level of YA novel to another, or even finishing any kind of novel, is as significant as moving from Nancy Drew to *Jane Eyre*. The elusiveness of "literary quality" also confounds this claim. To many it means "in comparison to Henry James or Ford Madox Ford." Young adult literature is *not* adult literature, although similar elements of quality may be evaluated in its criticism. In fairness to the argument of poor quality, however, it has more validity when applied to adolescent literature of the forties and fifties than that of today. One of the more significant changes in YA literature since then has been a dramatic increase in literary sophistication. To be of the literary complexity of adult novels, of course, would defeat the purpose of YA literature, although it is conceivable, if the present trend of increasing sophistication continues, that the literature will lose younger and less mature readers. That is, they will be written out of the readership. A strength of the present adolescent novel has to be that a young reader has the range of choices in subject matter and literary complexity reflected in Paula Danzinger's *There is a Bat in Bunk Five*,"

Joan Aiken's *Shadow Guests*,[12] and Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War*.

RECREATIONAL. The range and depth of YA literature are particularly useful qualities when one considers its recreational function. Its readability is typically of sixth to eighth grade levels, and it is interesting to most adolescents because it is about young people, offering them narrative fiction and varieties of nonfiction to balance conventional school literature, teen magazines, comic books, television, film, and pop music. It encourages the reading habit and tends to bridge to popular adult fiction and nonfiction (for better or for worse), often sustaining reading activity and growth until students are ready for more sophisticated reading and study. A limitation of YA literature, however, is the minimum of quality professional writing for adolescents in categories other than novel and various nonfiction forms. Little generic YA poetry and short story of the range and depth necessary to foster literary growth are available to teacher or student. Further, critics suggest that because of its problem focus the substance of YA literature is unwholesome and narrow in its representation of societal values, even delaying entry into the adult tradition. Because of its questionable content and realistic language, its serious concern for adolescent life, and its young adult audience, it is more censorable in a school setting than more conventional literature. Who needs the grief? Proponents argue that a reasonable analysis of the field would reveal that there is much YA literature that is no more censorable than conventional school literature. And students are more likely to respond to it, particularly in grades six through nine. If students don't read it, then nothing else really matters.

THERAPEUTIC. YA literature provides a kind of therapy as readers discover the universality of adolescence through vicarious experiencing of others' lives. The problems of characters reflect real life, and the reading experience can have cathartic value for the reader. Bibliotherapy, of course, has been a long-accepted technique in the fields of psychology and psychiatry, and recently has become more popular among youth therapists using poetry and adolescent novels to analyze problems, to examine alternative solutions, and to promote personal understanding. Critics of this use rightly caution that inasmuch as the responses of unstable adolescents to literature related to their problems are unpredictable, the risks involved for classroom teachers intending to effect behavioral change through literature are considerable. Teachers are not psychiatrists.

SUPPLEMENTAL. Works written for young people can add interest and deepen understanding of subject areas other than English: Social Studies, Science, Music, P.E., etc. Selected readings form Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer*,[13] for example, can extend a study of American family and teenage life of the late 1930s. Biographies of scientists or science fiction stories and novels can add interest to science, whereas biographies and other books by sports stars and coaches can provide insights into sports not usually available in the P.E. class. In addition to opposing arguments already stated, critics here note that there is barely enough time to cover subject matter as it is. They question whether other than English teachers can effectively use YA literature or even know where and when to use it without taking on another field. Proponents suggest that the answer must rest in quality teaching and cooperative ventures among the various subject fields.

REMEDIAL. Both sides agree that students at the secondary level performing below grade expectations can profit from YA literature. Proponents claim that it is a more humane medium to use than elementary basal readers, workbooks, and various reading kits. Though we seldom admit it (publicly), some students will never be able to independently read Shakespeare, Milton, Dostoyevsky, and Steinbeck. Reading an adolescent novel will be a peak experience; to the school that may be remedial, but to them that is capacity; opponents identify the remedial function as the *only* function, and that because YA literature is closer to a semblance of classic literature than comic books.

In general, most arguments against the use of adolescent literature as a significant part of the literature program are dated and echo reactions of critics of the fifties to a juvenile literature of that day and before. That sort of YA literature is no longer written, but its ghosts linger on. Thus, much present criticism, particularly that related to literary quality, does not come from a reasonable understanding of the whole of young adult literature, nor of the adolescent as a reader. The arguments for and against are inevitably polar because proponents tend to view the problem from the perspective of a contemporary adolescent (developing reading abilities, literary sophistication, and tastes) and the opponents from the view of a classic adult (preserving tradition and a classical view of quality). To be sure, YA literature is more vulnerable than adult literature when it is used as school content because it does not have the aura of sanctity enjoyed by many classics and anthologized works. But to teach only safe literature to unresponsive readers is pointless and hardly professional. We know the stones are bound to come, and to never have taught in a rippled pond is never to have taught at all.

Myself? I am a romantic. I love romantic poetry, particularly Keats, and classic literature of all kinds. My fondest wish is for all people to find the pleasure and insight I find in literature. Thus, I do not disagree with the end espoused by opponents of YA literature, only the means. After all, decades of the classic approach have produced a U.S. adult readership of serious literature of less than five percent. Serious readers of classics must be less than one percent. It seems that some sort of change is needed in the way we school young people in literature. Incorporating young adult literature into literature programs seems to be one alternative worth exploring.

End Notes

[1]Donelson, Kenneth and Alleen Pace Nilsen. *Literature For Today's Young Adults* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott-Foresman, 1980), p. 5.

[2]Nilsen, Alleen. "Adolescent Literature: Some Terminal Concerns," School Library Journal (March 1982).

[3]Donelson, Kenneth and Alleen Pace Nilsen. *Literature For Today's Young Adults* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott-Foresman, 1980), p. 5.

[4]Swartz, Sheila. *Teaching Adolescent Literature: A Humanistic Approach* (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Co., 1979), pp. 2-6.

[5]Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders* (New York: Dell, 1968).

[6]Cormier, Robert. *The Chocolate War* (New York: Dell, 1974).

[7]Blume, Judy. *Forever* (New York: Pocketbooks, 1976).

[8]Knowles, John. *A Separate Peace* (New York: Bantam, 1969).

[9]Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye* (New York:Bantam, 1977).

[10]Dizenzo, Patricia. *Phoebe* (New York: Bantam, 1977).

[11]Danzinger, Paula. *There's A Bat In Bunk Five* (New York: Delacorte, 1980).

[12]Aiken, Joan. *The Shadow Guests* (New York: Delacorte, 1980).

[13]Daly, Maureen. *Seventeenth Summer* (New York: Pocketbooks, 1977).

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Adolescent Literature: A Review

Texas Tech Journal of Education, VII (Winter 1980): 1-101. *Adolescent Literature.* Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, $4.00.

In this collection, adolescent literature really means the adolescent novel. Although some of the articles deal with media adaptations of junior novels, some mention collections of poetry and short stories for adolescents, and still others mention books originally written for a wider audience but perennially of interest to adolescents, the articles in this issue focus largely on the adolescent novel and exclude the nonfiction. A partial explanation for this is that there is a dearth of adolescent short fiction—though there are more than 5000 adolescent novels—and nonfiction for adolescents is invariably classified within other categories (textbooks and reference tools, for example), not treated separately, with a special audience in mind. Typical of the field in general, authors of the articles in this issue use several terms for the genre, each having several shades of meaning, including junior novel, young adult novel, teenage novel, and adolescent novel.

This issue opens with guest editor Michael Angelotti's contribution, "Do We Really *Want* to Teach Literature to Adolescents?" Pointing out the deadening practices in English teaching, the environmental forces inhibiting change, and the limitations (such as the frequent incompatibility between student reading ability and content readability) of literature programs that continue today, despite their having been readily apparent to many observers for several decades, Angelotti argues that literature teaching is dying a slow death in the schools, and may not survive the twentieth century unless rapid, pervasive change occurs. To accomplish the change, Angelotti proposes that the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents-NCTE (ALAN) form a commission to motivate, guide, and direct the necessary revolution to be fomented by classroom practitioners. Angelotti concludes that if his ten recommendations are not implemented, "We will be no more than curators of book museums by the new millenium" (p. 12).

Dwight L. Burton, whose ideas and influence pervade this volume, and indeed the entire field of adolescent literature, compares and contrasts the adolescent novels of the 1950s with those of the 1970s. The changes have nearly all been improvements. Burton's detailed analysis shows how the present generation of books is more responsive to events and trends of the times, is less didactic, is characterized by fewer restrictions in style and structure, and has characters that are bound by fewer conventions.

Robert C. Small, Jr., extends Burton's discussion of the generational differences between adolescents of the 1950s and those of today, building a convincing argument that the young adult novel does indeed reflect the times in which it was written. Small shows how the present generation's junior novelists present a drastically different picture of adolescence, one showing the realities of sexual maturity, sexual activity, the use of drugs, changing social attitudes, changing relationships with parents and other adults, and subtle changes in teenagers' attitudes toward conformity, religion, and the future.

Linda Bleich next examines "The Developmental Role of Adolescent Literature" and its place in the classroom. Contrasting the later adolescent novels with the earlier ones, she points out that the later ones more closely duplicate the identity-forming processes of adolescent cognitive and emotive growth. When the adolescent characters of the more recent books are permitted to select and test developmental options, the books give adolescent readers the vicarious experience involved in identity formation. In the earlier books, adult moralizing was more pervasive and the rights and wrongs were more clearly defined; thus the characters—and the readers—had fewer opportunities to grow.

W. Geiger Ellis and Phyllis Blair offer an empirical study of student preferences for the foci of literature study. Predictably, they found that students, across several grades and ability levels, prefer expressing their own ideas and feelings about the works more than they prefer other emphases (studying the life and times of the author, the structure of the work, or the historical period in which the work was set).

In "The Adolescent Novel: An Assessment of Readability," Al and Dorothy Muller examine the problems that have accompanied the increasing technical and artistic sophistication of the adolescent novel. The Mullers conclude that although educators no longer can assume that an adolescent novel can be read successfully by any adolescent who has mastered the rudimentary reading skills, the increased sophistication of the genre and the care taken in presenting it make the claim that the adolescent novel can serve useful pedagogical purposes more defensible than ever.

Theodore W. Hipple's "On Teaching Students to Evaluate Adolescent Novels" presents a lighthearted evaluation of *Forever* and *It's OK If You Don't Love Me* according to three "yardsticks" for literary evaluation: reflections of real life, artistry in details, and significant insights. *Forever* and *It's OK If You Don't Love Me* are two adolescent novels that are widely read by teenagers—perhaps at least in part because of their explicit portrayals of sex. Disturbed that teenagers too often think these are great books for the wrong reasons (because they are titillating, not because of their literary merit), Hipple proposes that the teenagers themselves be taught to use such criteria as Walter Blair and John Gerber's "yardsticks" (*Better Reading: Literature.* Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1959, P. 178).

Donald Gallo's "Informing Principals About Young Adult Literature" reports on a survey of secondary school principals. Gallo's findings were disappointing in that the principals he surveyed knew very little about adolescent literature and had read very few—if any—of the curriculum-relevant books he listed.

Next Richard A. Maynard, the editorial director of Scholastic Magazines' language arts periodicals (*Scope, Voice,* and *Literary Cavalcade*), discusses "Some Limitations of Adolescent Literature: A Publisher's View," pointing out the lack of short fiction, the scarcity of works written for boys and girls, the limited themes, and the absence of adolescent drama as some of the problems of adolescent literature.

Thomas J. Bondra's "Adolescent Fiction and the Visual Media" continues the analysis of the style and content of adolescent novels, focusing on problems encountered in adapting works with adolescent viewpoints for television. His identification of the features that make books easy or difficult to adapt to the visual media will be of interest to a wide variety of teachers, parents, and viewers of television.

In the last article, High Agee looks to the future in "Innovation and the Future of the Young Adult Novel." Innovations in content, the use of first-person narration, the use of multiple viewpoints, and such techniques as tape-recorded transcriptions, drawings, and handwritten notes are among the innovations Agee identifies. For the future, he projects several trends: more "novelizations" of television and film fare, such as "Star Trek"; more works with a sense of history, such as "Roots," and more fantasy and science fiction.

In short, the articles in this collection realistically analyze the problems related to adolescent literature: the declining vitality of literature programs in schools, the adolescent novel as a genre that deals with the teenage world uncompromisingly, and the questions related to media adaptations, school administrators' lack of knowledge of literature programs, and the negative effects on readability of the increasing sophistication of books. Nevertheless, the tone of the articles in this collection is largely positive and optimistic. Readers will realize that innovation in the books and revitalization of the literature programs are indeed possible. I strongly recommend the eleven articles in this volume as "musts" for teachers, librarians, English educators, and everyone interested in adolescents and what they read.

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Southwestern Literature for Adolescents: An Update

The literature of the Southwest encompasses a vast, sometimes indistinct, geographical and cultural area. Included are works of imagination, history, and philosophy; most are written by authors of the Southwest, but some by admirers and sojourners. No composite reference for secondary teachers to direct Southwestern literature to adolescents has been published since *Southwestern Literature and Culture in the English Classroom* (1971), edited by Kenneth L. Donelson. The bibliography following this article is a partial update of Southwestern literature, some of which I will discuss, that can be used with adolescents. Other than works from the last decade, it includes a few works not mentioned in the Donelson edition. The primary criteria I imposed on the works listed were appropriateness for adolescent readers and quality of writing. Although English teachers do not always concur on what quality writing is, we can probably agree that it includes style and content.

Unfortunately, many teachers still do not include Southwestern works in their classes. Various factors contribute to this exclusion (i.e., lack of funds to buy books, administrative de-emphasis of literature, or lack of knowledge in the area), but the most damaging factor is literary snobbery. Although most area teachers have learned to expect cultural condescension from non-Westerners, we should be concerned with state and area teachers who still seem embarrassed by their regional literature. We cannot expect others to consider Southwestern literature with critical open-mindedness if we do not read and advocate the works ourselves.

"We cannot expect others to consider Southwestern literature with critical open-mindedness if we do not read and advocate the works ourselves."

Because high school students will select the book with the most suggestive picture on the cover or the least number of pages, English teachers are responsible for suggesting and assigning works which will both appeal to the teenager and contain quality writing. Students can gain a special knowledge and appreciation for literature when given the opportunity to enjoy regional works. A natural tendency exists for them to empathize with personalities and actions developing on familiar ground. Expect to intrigue them with the lives and thoughts of those people closest to them geographically, historically, and philosophically. Not by coincidence, they will also encounter some of the finest aesthetic achievement American literature offers.

In her article, "What High School Students Are *Really* Reading" (*English Journal*, April 1973, pp. 573-76), Corrine Pollan identifies eight characteristics of novels that adolescents most often read. Four of these characteristics are especially applicable to all forms of Southwestern literature:

- *The central character is an outcast from society.* Southwestern literature is well represented by unique characters who are alienated from society and authority. Their appeal to adolescents is natural.

- ***Experience is emphasized over intellectualism.*** Tales of the Old West often depict life as an emotional, participatory event instead of a didactic one. This does not eliminate intellectual art from Southwestern literature but merely reflects the attitude of many of its characters.
- ***The pursuit of personal identity is a major occupation.*** The West has traditionally been looked to as a haven for those in search of themselves and as a place to develop.
- ***The state of adolescence is a changing ground between childhood innocence and adult reality.*** This characteristic is closely related to pursuing personal identity. The threshold of the West can be viewed as the crossover from a naive to a knowing existence.

My additions to Pollan's list are

- ***Realistic adventure.*** Adventures were easier to find in the days of buffalo hunts and Indian raids, but readers can still experience those times through reading. Contemporary life in the Southwest can still afford adventures for those young adults who seek it.
- ***Ethnic/cultural backgrounds*** (Native American, Chicano, Anglo, and Black). Many other cultures are represented in the Southwest, but the coexistence of these groups has been the major influence in producing its unique atmosphere. Most adolescents will be able to identify or empathize with at least one of them.
- ***Humor.*** Folktales of the old Southwest provide the slapstick and guffaws adolescents easily appreciate. More recent works exhibit the kind of intricate ironies and sharp satire that students should learn to recognize.

NONFICTION

Provocative nonfiction can provide rich enticement for young adults to read fiction, particularly for those with a history of reading problems or no special interest in literature. The interest of all students in the real world and real people can be enhanced by personal narratives, essays, and biographies. We English teachers need to remind ourselves that nonfiction can include all the adventure, mystery, romance, violence, idealism, and style found in fictional works. Students are also exposed to excellent models of the type of extensive writing required of them most often: the essay.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Experiences which broaden their knowledge of life are those for which teenagers hunger. Personal narratives offer them a variety and number of experiences they would never be able to fulfill themselves. ***Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America***, by Cabeza de Vaca, is the oldest example of literature from the Southwest, though of course originally written in Spanish. It is a brief, action-filled narrative in translation of the first Europeans to see Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Students can easily read it in one day, and many will want to keep on reading. Two reminiscences from contrasting cultural groups (Anglo and Hispanic) reveal different but demanding life styles on ranches in the early 1900s. ***In Time of Harvest***, by John L. Sinclair, and ***We Fed Them Cactus***, by Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, portray the contrast between a disenchanted Oklahoma family in search of a new home and an established Spanish-American dynasty.

BIOGRAPHY/AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Biographical works are very similar to personal narratives and have always been popular with young adults. A recent re-release which will interest teenage readers is the autobiography ***My Life on the Plains***, by General A. Custer. Books which have been produced as movies or from characters on TV specials can be assured of extra attention from readers. ***In Search of Butch Cassidy***, by Larry Pointer, not only recalls the famous outlaw's life but contains interesting speculation about his reported death in South America. For those students willing to become more intellectually involved, Paul Horgan's ***Lamy of Santa Fe*** is an absorbing biography and historical narrative.

ESSAY

Tony Hillerman has written a collection of essays, ***The Great Taos Bank Robbery, and Other Indian Country Affairs***, in a satirically humorous style. It includes characters from different ethnic groups and various outcasts from those groups. Two collections by and about Texans are guaranteed to amuse teenagers: Larry McMurtry's ***In a Narrow Grave*** and Larry L. King's ***Of Outlaws, Conmen, Whores, Politicians, & Other Artists***. Some of the language may be objected to so teachers need to keep their specific readers in mind.

FICTION

Too often, English teachers look to British and early New England writers as the sole sources of classic literature, and students complain they are not interested in works which appear alien to them. I do not suggest that we eliminate the valuable tradition of our literature from the classroom but that we incorporate Southwestern works into the curriculum to make the heritage complete.

SHORT STORY

Not all students require "warming up" to appreciate fiction, but most will enjoy having a brief short story such as "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," by Stephen Crane, read to them orally. Some good follow-up stories for student reading are "The Indian Well," by Walter Van Tilburg Clark, and "All Gold Canyon," by Jack London. An excellent collection of mostly Texas short stories is Carolyn Osborn's ***A Horse of Another Color***; "My Brother the Cowboy" is especially appropriate for teenagers. Several new anthologies of short fiction are now available. Besides short stories, ***Southwest Fiction***, edited by Max Apple, includes excerpts from novels which can be used to encourage students to do more extensive reading. ***The Western Story: Fact, Fiction, and Myth***, edited by Philip Durham and Everett Jones, is conveniently divided into nonfiction essays, short stories, and folklore, providing materials for comparative reading and discussion.

Despite the lack of federal support, many Texas teachers will continue to work with bilingual students. Although most of the material published for Spanish-speaking students aims at the elementary grades, there are some excellent materials for high school students. One of the most impressive is ***Cuentos: Tales from the Hispanic Southwest***, edited by José Griego y Maestro and Rudolfo A. Anaya. It is written in both English and Spanish, contains a glossary, includes appealing line drawings, and is packaged in a way to interest students. For further references on Mexican-American literature, the teacher may consult Cecil Robinson's ***Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest in American Literature*** and Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer's ***Chicano Voices***.

NOVEL

When teachers choose to assign or suggest novels for student reading, there are numerous titles to choose from on many different levels of interest and difficulty. One recent successful example of a TV adaptation is James Michener's ***Centennial***. Its length may deter unenthusiastic readers and make it unsuitable for classroom reading, but it is written in an easily read style. It is sometimes helpful to have specific books in mind for male or female students who ask you for suggested reading. For pure adventure, ***Lord Grizzly***, by Frederick Manfred, will be

especially attractive to boys who want a strong plot line. If you want something in a simple style but of mature subject for girls, the re-release of Dorothy Scarborough's *The Wind* is appropriate. The transformation of a Virginia girl from naivete to stark maturity on the West Texas plains is sympathetically described. Elmer Kelton has written two novels about Texas but with more complex characters and plot. *The Time It Never Rained* centers around an aging rancher who is battling against not only drought but the pressures of bureaucratic federal intervention and his fellow ranchers. *The Wolf and the Buffalo* is based on the Black cavalry units established in the West to fight Indians after the Civil War. It is a unique portrayal of a Black soldier and an Apache warrior who meet intermittently on the battlefield throughout the novel. Another historically based novel is *A Very Small Remnant*, by Michael Straight, which fictionalizes one of the Army atrocities committed against Native Americans unable to defend themselves. Edward Abbey describes the dilemma of survival for a Hopi shaman and other misfits in a chaotic future society in *Good News*. NCTE's publication *Literature by and About the American Indian*, by Anna Lee Stensland, is the prime source for additional references to Native American literature.

Southwestern literature has gained in literary prominence in the public schools during the last decade, but many secondary teachers remain either unaware or unwilling to include these works in their classes. The best cure for this condition is for them to dismount their literary high horse and read, or at least read about, the works produced in and about our area and state. The newest and most complete bibliographic reference for those who want a general source is *Southwestern American Literature*, edited by John Q. Anderson, et al. Do not deny yourself and your students the enjoyment and knowledge to be gained from reading these works. If you are unfamiliar with the literature, start with the Donelson edition for an introduction and direction. If you now include classics such as *Shane* or *The Oxbow Incident* in your classes, then consider some of the more recent or neglected works to expand your curriculum.

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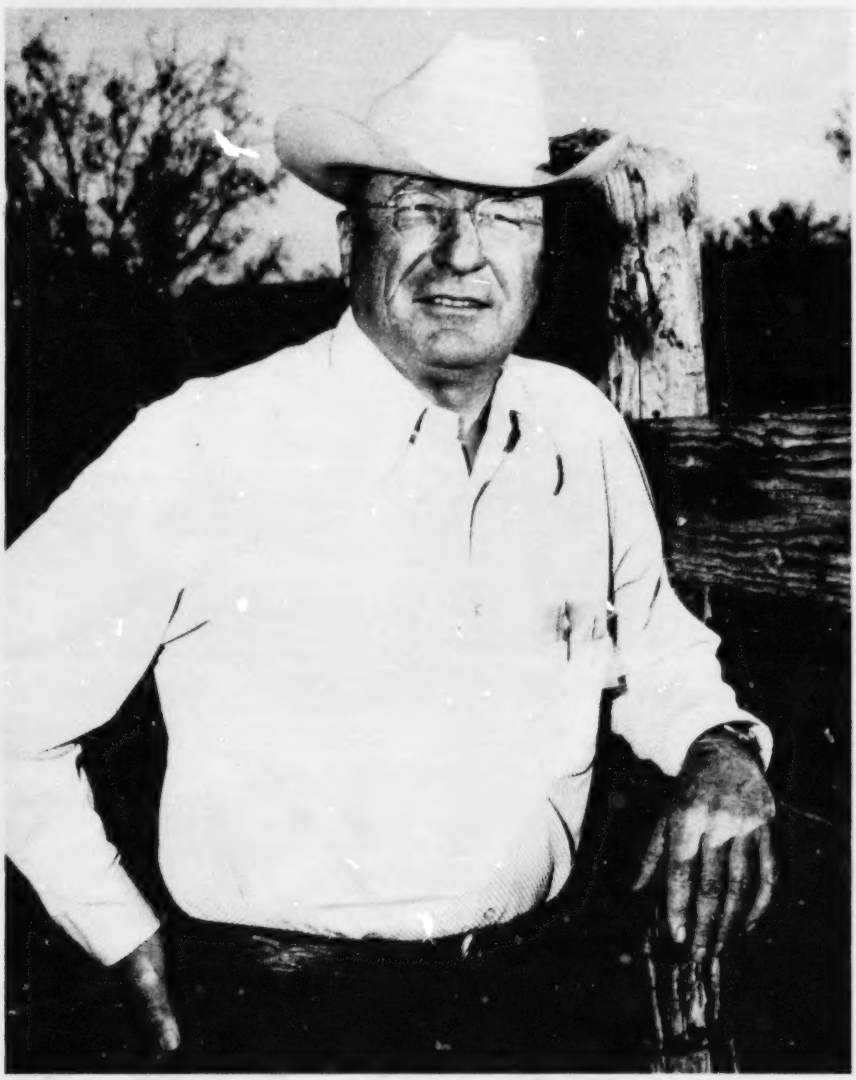
Talking with a Texan



Elmer Kelton is a West Texan. He was born on the Scharbauer Cattle Company's Five Wells Ranch in Andrews County, Texas, April 29, 1926. His father, R. W. (Buck) Kelton was a cowboy, ranch manager and ranch owner, and his mother was a school teacher. After serving in the United States Army in World War II, he completed his bachelor of arts degree in 1948 at the University of Texas in Austin. He joined the San Angelo Standard Times where he was agricultural editor until 1968. Then he became and remains the associate editor of the (West Texas) Livestock Weekly.

Kelton lives with his wife Ann on Oxford Street near the university in San Angelo. He met her in Austria when he was in the Army. For a Texan, Kelton speaks rapidly with an easy West Texas accent, and he is somewhat shy when talking about the art of writing. His conversation is filled with wry, understated humor.

The interview was held between sessions of the Texas Folklore Society which met in Denton, Texas, April 16 to 18, 1981. Doubleday had published his last novel, The Wolf and the Buffalo (1980), and were to issue The Eyes of the Hawk in August under Kelton's pseudonym, Lee McElroy.[1] Kelton is the author of twenty-five western historical novels, including The Time It Never Rained (1973), The Day the Cowboys Quit (1971), and The Good Old Boys (1978). He is the recipient of several awards including the Golden Saddleman trophy from the Western Writers of America in 1977, three Spur awards and two Western Heritage awards from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Your long novel *The Wolf and the Buffalo* is getting good reviews. How did you come to write the novel?

K: This was more or less an assigned topic. I hadn't really seriously thought about it as a subject, but Doubleday came up with a proposition. *Reader's Digest Condensed Books* had suggested they would like to have a novel about the black cavalry in the West. Since I had several Doubleday books by this time, my Doubleday editor suggested that I might be the one to do this.

In *The Wolf and the Buffalo* you actually have two heroes, Gray Horse Running and Gideon Ledbetter. How did you come to select Gray Horse Running?

K: Well, I wanted to have two characters more or less representative of the two races, the two completely different cultures. I try to write about people who are not extraordinary, who are in some ways typical of whatever group they represent. I wanted to write this from the standpoint of people down on the ground level rather than from the standpoint of the generals or the great (Indian) chiefs. I wanted this to be done from the viewpoints of a common soldier and a more or less ordinary Indian warrior, not one of great rank, just a warrior or man among his own peers. I developed these characters as in some ways representative of all in their respective groups.

You gave each man a close friend—Jimbo and Limping Boy. Do you have a reason for the friendships?

K: Most of the people I know have good or close friends and a lot of times two people who are good friends complement each other, although there are differences in their basic characters. Both of these are more or less for support; both challenge the main characters, but more than anything else, I used them to help bring out the viewpoint of the main character.

Limping Boy is an excellent counterpart to Gray Horse Running. Gray Horse Running says that the Comanche are "the people." What is the origin of the word Comanche?

K: It came from the Utes. The transla-

tion was something like "the enemy." The Comanches were a group which had broken off from the Shoshonis in the north, and they were basically Shoshoni Indians, but two or three hundred years before their appearance in the story, they had broken away and had drifted farther south.

Then you had to have that tribe? They couldn't have been the Apache or some other tribe?

K: Well, in this particular case, I used history as much as I could. I wanted to write about the area I knew best and this area happened to have been, during that time, Comanche country. It had been Apache at an earlier time, but that was before the soldiers ever came in. The Comanches drove the Apaches out before the white man really moved into the area in any strength.

The story is set at Fort Concho. What was Fort Concho?

K: Fort Concho was founded in 1867, but really it was started in 1868 after the Civil War at the confluence of the three Concho Rivers. It was set up basically to guard the trail from San Antonio to El Paso, and it was on the north-south line from the Red River to the Rio Grande. It was part of that chain of forts from Richardson to Griffin, Concho, McKavett and on down to Fort Clark on the river.

You open Gideon's section with the sale of the Old Colonel's plantation, so the novel is set after the Civil War?

K: This would be after the Civil War. There were no black units—there had been a few in the war, but after the war they organized four regiments of black soldiers and all of them wound up on the frontier: two infantry and two cavalry.

You have done a lot of research for this novel about black soldiers in the West. Would you tell us about your sources?

K: The Ninth and Tenth were cavalry units and served in Texas in the seventies. Colonel Grierson was the Commanding Officer of the Tenth, probably longer than anyone else. The Tenth was more in the northern part and the Ninth was in the southern area. At various times both the Ninth and Tenth were at Fort Concho.

Near the end of your book, the Tenth is about "wiped out" on that long march.

K: Well not really. That was just one company. That story is based on a real incident. I took some liberties with the individual characters, but in the event of the desert march, I tried to follow the history as nearly verbatim as I could.

It certainly was a terrible experience for both the men and their horses.

K: Right. The only animal survivor, I think, was one mule. One or two horses, a few, may have later drifted into the lakes, but nearly all of them died. Of course in those days blacks were rare in the North. Most of the blacks were still in the southern slave states, or what had been slave states. After the war there was a great deal of unemployment because the plantation owners who used them as slaves couldn't afford to pay wages because they were in severe financial stress themselves. A lot of these fellows found work as soldiers. In a way the military was not much different from the servitude they had suffered before the war. They were used to having someone else making the decisions, doing their thinking, and giving them orders. Nearly all of the black soldiers in this time were illiterate because as slaves either they were not encouraged to read or were actually forbidden to learn to read and write, so they came into the military without any background of reading or writing. This meant that the white officers had to do all of their own reports. They had no enlisted men to fall back on who could do this chore, which they would have had in white units. But as far as the service in the field was concerned, these men were as capable as any because basically they were following orders; they were warm bodies in a saddle on a horse. More than anything else that's what it really came to. The desertion rate among the black units was far less than the desertion rate among comparable white units because to them that life, as bad as it was, was an improvement over what they had had before, whereas with many of the whites, it was a step down. To the blacks this was an advancement and the majority had no desire to leave. This was a step up.

You do have Gideon learning how to read and write.

K: A lot of them did, and I based this on facts too. There was a chaplain at Fort Concho named Badger and I used him peripherally in the book. I had him giving school lessons, reading lessons, at night, and he actually did in real life.

He has a problem with Hannah York, the black woman who is in the laundry business. He is very disillusioned by his relationship with her. He loved her very much, and of course, finds out she is the fort prostitute. Do you have a prototype for Hannah?

K: Not really. Here again I was trying to make a point with her. She is of the first group freed from slavery. A lot of people were not able to make the adjustment to freedom. In their minds they had been slaves; they continued to be slaves to somebody, and in her mind she was still a slave of the old Granny. Whatever Granny said, she did. She couldn't muster enough initiative to ever free herself from that.

Granny ran her. Granny ran the business.

This was a problem those people had in that time and which carried well into this century. In a lot of families there were several generations who never were able to feel they were free people. The present generation is beginning to feel a total equality.

Your philosophy here about freedom comes out in Dempsey.

K: Dempsey is a rebellious soldier.

He feels the Indians are losing their freedom just as the blacks lost theirs, but now the blacks have regained their freedom and it really isn't a freedom. Gideon then says something about the Indians, Mexicans and blacks who are in a similar relationship to the whites.

K: Well, of course in the case of the blacks, the black didn't have freedom. That is, he hadn't had it since he'd left his homeland. The Indian was losing his. The point I was trying to make is that these people had more in common than they knew at the time. To the Indian the black was just another white man with a black face. He saw no difference basically between the white man and the black man because they were both his enemy. The black man saw the Indian as an enemy to be feared, and he saw him very much as the white man did. In their relationships they had much in common and yet they never did see it at the time. Dempsey saw it, but ironically, the people he went to as friends didn't see it, and they killed him.

They repulsed his friendship because to them he was just another enemy. He was an instrument for their

revenge. Killing him satisfied most of their desire for revenge other than that of Gray Horse.

Because he was one of the buffalo soldiers and the Indians saw them as the enemy.

K: The Indians never made any distinction about individual guilt. If a white man wronged an Indian and there was revenge to be taken, the revenge was taken against the first white person who became handy. They didn't have to try to hunt down *that* white person. Any white person would do. I think, to a large degree, the white people had the same feeling about Indians. If you had an Indian raid, you went out and took revenge on the first bunch of Indians you came across. They would kill the women and children. It was Colonel John M. Chivington who called the Indian children "nits" when he massacred a peaceful Cheyenne village at Sand Creek.

Wasn't it during the Battle on the High Plains where Gideon shot the Indian woman?

K: This was in a skirmish in one of the battles that took place before the big battle of Palo Duro Canyon. I read all of the scouting records that have been typewritten and transcribed into good useful form there at Fort Concho. I didn't use any one thing but just kind of used the spirit and tone of them for the different scouting expeditions that I took the soldiers on, including that one. Most of those scouting reports told about "traveled three-hundred miles"; "traveled four-hundred and fifty miles; saw no Indians," but every once in a while there would be a report on a skirmish.

You mention the Medicine Lodge Treaty in your novel. What was this treaty?

K: The Medicine Lodge Treaty was in 1867 and was an effort by the government to allot the Indians reservations. The Medicine Lodge Treaty would have given them more country. It guaranteed the Indians their particular land, and if they wouldn't cross this way, we wouldn't cross that, etc. It probably held up from summer to fall of the year it was signed. It was pretty well honored in the breach by both parties. I don't think the Indians kept it any better than the whites did. But it was a strong effort and it was used—it stayed on paper and there were attempts to enforce it for a long time. The buffalo hunters, when they began to move south across the Cimarron River, violated the treaty. The buffalo hunters came south in the fall of 1873, and by this time the Medicine Lodge Treaty was several years old, but they were in violation all right. What had happened was the buffalo hunters first began to kill the buffalo along the main transcontinental railway—along the Union Pacific. That meant they cleaned out the buffalo in the middle part of the country, and after two or three years of slaughter there wasn't anything left along the Arkansas River or in that area, so they had to either go south or go north. Their inclination was to go south where the weather was more favorable, so they went south into Texas. They went to General Sheridan and asked him what he would do if they violated the treaty and went south. He said, "Well, boys, if I were a buffalo hunter, I'd go where the buffalo are." He wanted the buffalo killed because he knew that so long as the Indian had the buffalo, the Indian was going to remain independent. If they could ever kill all of the buffalo, then the Indian would become dependent and the army could handle them. So you know, from an historical standpoint he was farsighted. Now I won't judge him on his humanity, but historically speaking he knew what he was doing.

You covered the buffalo hunters in an earlier novel.

K: I covered this to a degree in *Buffalo Wagons*.

The title of your book is *The Wolf and the Buffalo*, and you make a comment about it in the book.

K: Well, the title just sort of fell into place. I don't remember any conscious or specific moment in which it came about. The wolf, of course, referred to the Indian who had the spirit or medicine of the wolf and the buffalo referred to the soldier who got his name from the Indians, who thought he looked a little bit like a buffalo. In fact the Tenth cavalry used a buffalo on their coat of arms.

Lt. Hollander is your main white hero.

K: Right. I tried to avoid telling any of this story through a white man's eyes, but I had to a little bit because I wanted to give the flavor of frontier post life at the officer level. There was no way to do that through Gideon's eyes or the Indian's. To Gideon, the officers were living in another world, but by our standards even the highest officers in these frontier forts had just barely better than a marginal existence themselves. I was trying through Hollander to show the post life and the deprivations, particularly of the officer's wives. The colonel's wife and her furniture—this little remnant was all she had to show for thirty odd years as an army wife, moving from one post to another. They had a pretty miserable life. If you look at the army records you'll find that the death rate among dependents was fairly high and almost always from disease, not from Indians. Disease killed more soldiers on the frontier than were ever killed by the Indians.

How long did it take you to write the novel? It's a long book.

K: I'd say two years, including the research. I fudged a little bit by using a country I already knew. I already had a long running start when I began the book. I spent more time agonizing over building the characters because usually, in most of the books I've ever done, Ive had the characters and the story in mind for several years, and I've gotten to know the people before I ever write about them. In this case, I had to get acquainted with the characters pretty fast. You can't ever create one in the whole flesh until you actually put him on paper. You know, I carry them around in my mind and get so that I think I know them, but after I put them on paper, they'll take on dimensions and make changes that I didn't anticipate.

I can see that in Gideon, and in Gray Horse Running.

K: I was trying to have Gideon gain in depth and experience and confidence. He had no confidence when he started. He had always been a slave and had taken orders. Suddenly he was on his own, and he didn't feel he could live up to it. So I was trying in the book to have him going up all the time; whereas with Gray Horse, after a point, I had him on a decline so that they met each other in parallel: one going up, one going down.

Reminds me of Hewey Calloway in *The Good Old Boys*.

K: Yes. That's part of what I was trying to do with Hewey Calloway. He met the challenge after he caused his brother to be hurt and left the family dependent. He met the challenge by

taking his brother's place, but he couldn't meet the challenge of changing his own character. He remained as he was. When he finished his responsibility to the family, then he became himself again. A few years ago at Utah State University—when Dr. (C. L.) Sonnichsen was on the program and some others—somebody asked me what was the difference between my approach and Louis L'Amour's approach on Western stories, and I said, "Well, mainly one of approach to characters. Louis' characters are seven feet tall and invincible and mine are more like five feet six and nervous."

Let's talk a minute about *The Time It Never Rained*, about Charlie Flagg. Is Charlie based a little on your father?

K: Well, my father, as a type, and other ranchmen of the same type. I borrowed quite a bit from my father and from other ranchmen I knew. I've had people ask me if I wrote it about their fathers and I guess in a sense I did. I wrote about all of our fathers at that time.

Charlie Flagg is a strong man. He's very good to the Mexicans. Were there Mexican people working for your family?

K: Not many. My dad had a few work for him at odd times, but not steadily.

What is his name? Manuel?

K: Manuel was the boy. His father had been with Charlie all these years, and Charlie had to finally let him go because the drought had closed in. He hoped he could someday get him back but knew deep down he never would because, when Juan made the change to the city, he wouldn't come back.

Charile's son was not a very good son.

K: Well, his son was a little like Hewey Calloway. He wanted to lead his own life.

His father didn't understand him?

K: Or vice versa. This was a generation gap. In a way, what I was trying to do here—there were two generations with two different views toward government programs, government aid. To Charlie the most terrible thing you could do would be to accept help from the government because this, to him, was like his grandfather speaking about a pauper's oath. Back in the fifties, I heard any number of ranchers say this "I just will not take a pauper's oath," and yet, the younger generation accepted this — "this is our right, we're taxpaying citizens, it's our right to take whatever the government will give us because we have paid taxes into it; it's ours." I think there is a generation difference. The young never had to face the things on their own two feet without any outside help. They always had something to fall back on. They always knew in their minds that if it gets terrible enough the government is not going to let them starve to death. Charlie's generation and those before didn't have that assurance. To Charlie it was a choice—to give up his pride and dignity or to give up his possessions. In his case he chose to give up his possessions. He could get his possessions back, but he could never regain his dignity if he ever lost it.

That was important to him, even when he finally lost the goats in the rain. It was a tragic thing because by this time he had lost everything.

K: Well, except that he still had hope; he was telling Mary, you know, but she didn't understand. But tomorrow maybe she would, or a few days from now she would begin to understand. I've had a lot of people criticize me for the end of that book, but my feeling all along was that life just doesn't get tied up at the end with a nice pretty red ribbon. If I had had it rain in the last chapter and everything was fine, people would have said, "Well, I knew it was going to come out that way all the time." So I had to make it different. I always try to figure out what the reader is going to expect to happen next, given a certain set of inputs, and then I'll pass that by and do something else. I always try to fool them a little bit, and especially with the climax of the story.

When I read *The Time It Never Rained*, and I got to the point where they had just sheared the goats, I knew he was going to lose them, probably, and yet I hoped he wouldn't. The rain is the saving thing. He had some land left.

K: Yes. He's going to come back. He'll never be as strong as he was, but he's going to survive. I saw this happen, not so much losing goats; I knew some people who did that, but, by and large, I saw a lot of people survive, never again quite as strong as they had been before, but they did survive. With a little time and a little luck, a little extra credit, they did come back.

The Day the Cowboys Quit is your other novel where the cowboys survive, in a sense?

K: In this one, once again I was trying to do a little sociological study. The cowboy strike was lost by everybody who participated in it, on both sides, in a way. The immediate effect of it was that the cowboys lost and were, by and large, out of work. But in the long run, the ranchers lost because a lot of the cowboys stayed around. They took up land; they became small landowners, or they moved to town and became business people, and they began to outnumber the ranch people and take over the political dominance. So the big ranchers, after a very short time, lost their political dominance which they had had unquestioned until the strike. Really the strike was just a symptom of the changes. I don't think the strike itself brought all this about. I think the strike was brought about by the changes, and these changes would have happened with or without the strike.

The historical approach you have is strong in your novels, and your characterization seems to get better. Your last four novels have good characters.

K: We were talking about this last night, and I was relating this to the movies of John Ford. In all of John Ford's movies, which I have always admired very much, every character is an individual; even if he doesn't do anything but walk across the screen and serve at the bar for a half a minute, he has something distinctive about him that sets him apart from everybody else in the picture. This was always to me a Ford trademark. His people were characters, and though he may not have been able to give them a deep characterization, each was himself, not a type. This is something that I have always tried to emulate.

You say that Bantam is going to pick up some of your titles?

K: Bantam is picking up nine titles of my old Ballantines, and they have also bought the rights to *The Wolf and the Buffalo*. They'll begin to issue these sometime this summer.

Do they start with *Llano River*?

K: They start with *Captain's Rangers*. I'm doing a short historical background piece to go in each one of these to sort of set up the history.

Like a preface?

K: Right. Like a preface of some sort. I'm not sure whether it will actually go as a preface or at the end of the book, but anyway it will give some historical background, because all of these books do have a historical background to some extent.[2]

How about the new one you say is coming out in August under your pseudonym, Lee McElroy?

K: It's called *The Eyes of the Hawk*. It's based on history and folklore. I started with a legend which has been around a long time about old Helena Town in South Texas, although in the book I fictionalize it. I took a lot of liberties, used a lot of imagination. I just took the legend itself as a starting place and built on it, so I can't say it is the history or folklore either, but I use that as a starting place.

Can you give us a little of the plot?

K: Basically the plot covers twenty-five to thirty years starting with the narrator, who comes as a very young man from back in Louisiana. He has come across the gulf in a ship and lands at old Indianola which was a major Texas seaport in those days. It was later destroyed by a hurricane. He lands there broke and with no prospects. All he knows is that he wants to go inland away from the coast and get a job. So he finds a place with this ranchman—the main character—who has come up to get a load of goods. This fellow is ranching and selling farming equipment, etc. So he rides inland with this young man and a group of Mexican cartmen. This is at the time of the Cart Wars, and the villain, or the person the main character sees as the villain, has a string of wagons in competition with the cartmen. The Anglo wagoners and the Mexican cartmen are at war more or less over rates. Everything is economic, so they get in a battle on the trail and the main character always blames the villain of the story for all his misfortunes. He sees the town, which corresponds to Helena—in the book it's Stonehill—as being the root of all his problems. The town has killed his father and as the story progresses, it kills his brother. Later on in the story the fever comes up from the coast and they get the fever in the city and it kills his mother and his wife, so all the misfortunes that pile up on this main character during the years he blames on the town. As the years go by, he develops an intense hatred for the place and also for the man he sees as the villain who runs the town. What I'm trying to do in the story is to show a subtle change of character. The villain of the story at the beginning mellows as he gets older and becomes more or less benign, whereas the hero becomes more belligerent. In fact, he and the villain swap places toward the end of the book and by the time the book ends, they've taken an opposite position.

That's a new twist—a reversal of the characters.

K: It's a kind of a Polish western. The Polish community is pretty prominent in the story. I try to follow the true history of them with a lot of leeway for fiction.

Did you write it since you finished *The Wolf and the Buffalo*?

K: I started it before *The Wolf and the Buffalo*, but I set it aside to do *The Wolf and the Buffalo* and finished it afterwards. By the time I had finished *The Wolf and the Buffalo*, I had to restart and I changed a lot of things. This thing about the character reversal sort of came to me as I was going through *The Wolf and the Buffalo*. I hadn't really envisioned that when I started the story. It was going to be straighter, more of a white hat-black hat type of story, but I just couldn't settle for that, so as I was doing this parallel between Gideon and Gray Horse, it came to me that I could do a little bit of the same thing with these other two characters.

Didn't you have another novel set in that area called *Manhunters*?

K: Yes. *Manhunters* was based on an incident that took place in the same county—Karnes County, a little later in time.

The main character killed a sheriff?

K: Right. It actually happened after the turn of the century.

That story is based on true fact, isn't it?

K: To a large degree on Gregorio Cortez. Here again I took liberties. That's why I changed names. I use something out of folklore or history as a starting place, but I have never felt comfortable about taking liberties with real historical characters. If I'm going to do it, I want to change their names. Then I have total freedom to do as I want with them. I just don't like to use real people. I may use a real one for background, like MacKenzie, who walks across the stage in *The Wolf and the Buffalo*, or old Rip Ford, who walks across the stage in a couple of the other books, but I don't really use them for more than just a stage setting. I just don't like to make up actions and words for real people. A lot of writers can do that, but I can't.

I like the book *Manhunters*.

K: Thank you. That was my last Ballantine, and in a lot of ways my best one for them.

Are you working on anything now?

K: I'm just trying to get started.

Have you a title?

K: No. I haven't. Sometimes a title doesn't come to me until I get through with a book. In fact, you know the book *Long Way to Texas*? I wrote the title when I wrote the last line because the title came out of that last line. I didn't know what I was going to call it until that last line showed up on paper. Then I had a title. Usually I have a title somewhere fairly early, but I haven't got one for this one.

Any progress on it you could tell us about?

K: No. Actually, I haven't gotten anything on paper. It's all still in my head. I won't be doing a monumental western at the same time. It's hard for me to keep two afloat. I asked Ben Capps awhile ago what he was doing and he said, "I'm working on three or four right now." Of course Ben is, I think, writing full time. If I were doing that, possibly I could make it work, but doing it part-time, I can't juggle them. If I start one like *The Wolf and the Buffalo* after I start another, I just have to drop the first one and concentrate on the other, and then try to bring the other one back to life. I knew this other one was a lesser book so I just kind of put it back on the shelf. I let my mind run to it, but as far as actually working on it, I didn't.

END NOTES

[1]For a complete listing and discussion of the work of Elmer Kelton, see my essay, "Elmer Kelton and the Popular Western Novel," *Southwest Heritage*, 8:2 (Summer, 1978), 8-19.

[2]*Captain's Rangers* was issued in September 1981 by Bantam and carries an Author's Note at the front of the novel. There is a brief biographical sketch at the end.

Joyce Gibson Roach
Keller High School

Teaching Southwest Literature in High School

He was almost eighteen and small for his age. His polished boots, fitted Western-yoked shirt and pressed Levis were testimony that he was a Westerner. Snuff can in his hip pocket, boots apart, arms folded and hat tiptilted announced that he was a Texas boy trying for Texas manhood. A carbon copy of the boy-man stood inside my classroom door. They were aware of my presence at the desk but apparently felt no discomfort. "I heard it with my own ears down at Sonic yesterday evenin'. He called you a son-of-a-bitch," said the second to the first. With that, both boys looked at me sheepishly. The small-for-his-age, cowboy-man fielded the insult. "Well . . . well, when he called me that . . . did he smile?" We all laughed. The answer was straight from the pages of Owen Wister's *The Virginian* in which the hero, called a name by the villain, cautions Trampas, "When you call me that, smile!" Both young men were in my Southwest literature class and had at least a nodding acquaintance with the Virginian as well as with other fictional heroes and heroines of the region.

Never has there been a finer time for Southwest student and Southwest literature to meet head on. Department stores declare this season "The Year of the Texan" and "The Year of the Southwesterner" too. Much of the world, even in such unlikely places as Japan, wear some forms of Western clothing. Prairie skirts, squash blossoms, boots, Western yokes, feather hat bands, and Bull Durham sacks declare the world's interest in "our" world. The return to nostalgia which gained momentum some five years ago has come to focus on our own back yards and stomping grounds. To be able to teach the life and literature of the Southwest is a pleasure anytime, but there is an added dimension when the eyes of the world are turned Westward and backward to the past, and all my students seem to have arrived in costume to celebrate.

One cannot teach a subject, however, merely for its timeliness. Trends pass away. There are other reasons for including the teaching of Southwest literature in the high school curriculum.

My course in the literature of the Southwest came about as a result of the return to the semester plan. Wanting to offer seniors some choices from a wider variety of English courses designed to last for only a semester rather than a full year, the English chairman questioned teachers about what courses they would like to offer, what methods they would use, and what materials they would need. Because my field lies in Southwestern and Western folklore and history and because of a long association with the Texas Folklore Society which has produced some of the finest writers in the state, region and world, I asked to teach a course in Southwestern literature. After requesting thirty-five copies of six paperback novels and submitting a bibliography of available material from the library, I found myself in business.

The question arises, "What is Southwest literature?" First of all, it is American literature. More specifically, it is produced in a special geographic region by and about the particular peoples who lived or live there. It has for its heroes and heroines cowboys, Indians, mountain men, Mexicans, bad men, outlaws, women of every type and ethnic background, and blacks. Cowboys and Indians play such a large part in the literature of the past that many critics feel that Southwestern literature is nothing more than the Western genre. The Western is certainly part but not nearly all the literature has to offer.

For a long time there was no literature of the Southwest except for the chronicles of the Conquistadores, travel journals, and letters describing the new land. Poetry and drama appeared only in the oral tradition of chanting Indians or in simple Mexican folk plays. Dime Novel Westerns featuring derring-do out on the plains and Amazonian women who could rope, ride, and rescue the men folks, finally gave way to the Zane Grey Western featuring good guys-bad guys and sexy women in tight jeans. It was such eminent writing and lecturing Texans as Mabel Major, C.L. Sonnichsen, and Frank Dobie who, through their courses entitled The Life and Literature of the Southwest, brought to the attention of the state a body of material worthy of being called literature. It is comforting to note that most textbooks in American literature now include selections from the Southwest by Southwestern authors.

It is also a good idea to explain just where the Southwest is and why it is important enough to produce a literature distinctly its own. Some authorities say that the Southwest is the area made up of Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, and Arkansas. Others add Kansas or Colorado. Some insist that California ought to be included. There is some disagreement as to the breadth and depth of the area, but most would agree that the locale is permeated by certain characteristics of geography and weather which include plains, semi-arid desert, mountains, heat, sun, lack of water, wind, wide horizons—an atmosphere seen, felt, and heard which stains and colors the literature. It follows that people are affected by living in such an environment and the literature reflects both the environment and people.

There are certain noticeable groups who have lived and still live in the Southwest. The Mexican, the Indian, and the Anglo—a group who conflicted often with both the other groups—appear often in the literature. The Anglo may appear as cowboy, pioneer, mountain man, bandit, outlaw, sheriff and in other guises; and the term Anglo is an all inclusive term to distinguish him from the other two.

The characteristics of the literature of the Southwest are not always consistent. Certain features, however, do appear regularly enough in the literature to be able to make generalizations. The reading often reflects the free life and life out-of-doors. Indian and Spanish words, cowboy and Western lingo appear in *Red Sky at Morning* and *When*

the Legends Die. Cowboys, Indians, Mexicans, bandits and renegades appear in the literature of the past, but a myriad of others including figures from the sports, oil, technical, and political worlds populate modern novels and non-fiction. The literature is sometimes robust, vigorous, and it moves at a fast pace as in the novels of Louis L'Amour. It is apparently important for writers to explain that a rough, thorny, harsh environment produces rough, thorny, harsh characters and helps to explain why the characters behave as they do in books like *Roy Bean, Outlaw*, and *The Valdez Horses*. Landscape descriptions often create a certain brooding, mysterious, and frightening quality in the literature, as in *Giant, The Unforgiven*, and *Giants in the Earth*. Adapting to a new and harsh environment is a frequent theme. The setting of the Southwest itself is a symbol which asserts that the Southwest represents the free life where old rules do not apply, where life is lived more freely, where anything can happen and often does, where the unbelievable becomes the believable. Spaciousness, openess, what is *real* crops up again and again; students find the *real* in *A Woman of the People, A Distant Trumpet*, and *Jubilee Trail*. A favorite literary device is taking characters from the strongholds of civilization, as Virginia or the courteous South, setting them down in the Southwest and allowing the reader to watch as the region and its people make better or destroy the central character. *Sea of Grass, The Wind*, and *Giant* make use of this device. Occasionally, as in *Chicaro* and *Viva Chicano*, the reader is allowed to see what happens when a Southwesterner is taken out of his native environs and placed somewhere else.

The women of the literature of the Southwest have a significant place. Four types are evident: those who came and lost their minds because they could not adjust (*The Wind, Giants in the Earth*, and *Jubal Troop*); those who died because of the physical and mental problems they suffered (*Sam Chance*); those who came but never adjusted to the Southwest (*The Unforgiven*); those who did adjust and came to love life in the Southwest (the stories of Eugene Manlove Rhodes, Bertha Muzzy Sinclair, and *North of 36*). There are as well many factual accounts of women's lives in the Southwest: *No Life for a Lady, A Bride on the Old Chisholm Trail, A Cowman's Wife, The Cowgirls*, and *Hell on Women and Horses*.

My course surveys all kinds of literature with special emphasis on the novel. Students are to cover a minimum of six novels in a semester using at least two days a week of class time to read uninterrupted. One to two days are used for class lecture to acquaint students with the scope of Southwestern literature. Without an anthology—the two best ones by Martin Shockley and C.L. Sonnichsen are out of print—there appeared little choice except to use novels. The lecture material is taken from Mabel Major and Matt Pierce's *Southwest Heritage: A Literary History*. The students feel that it prepares them for the lectures and reading they will encounter in college.

While class activities Monday through Thursday are structured, Friday activities are varied. The periods are marked by the absence of books and assignments. On some Fridays the students bring some simple craft-type project to work on in class. The idea for the project must come from reading in Southwest literature. Boys pick up on passages about windmills, barbed wire, guns and cowboy equipment. Wooden and metal windmills begin to take shape over the weeks. Collecting barbed wire, making antique guns from kits, braiding horse hair ropes, fashioning spur rowels, polishing bits and Bowie knife blades, and sketching scenes of frontier life keep the boys active. The girls produce art, needle work, crocheted or knitted objects; they quilt, spin yarn in the Indian manner with hand held spools, and sew on an antique treadle sewing machine, all in emulation of the women's lifestyle on the frontier. Some enjoy creating miniature rooms described in some novel. Card board boxes serve as walls. Student imagination, miniature furniture and scraps of material provide the rest. One of the most memorable creations was the living room in Lutie's house, inspired by Conrad Richter's *Sea of Grass*, in which Lutie is the heroine. Some combine their projects and design full scale villages or ranches complete with barns and pens. Indian pottery provided projects for one class. The art teacher supplied clay and instruction. The kiln was a large barrel lined with hay, sawdust, and cow manure. The firing of the pieces filled the air with the odor of the ancient way pottery was fired. A competition is held at the end of each semester for judging projects and awarding prizes.

Chili cookoffs are held at least once a semester on a Friday. The students divide into groups of four, plan their own chili recipes and in some good mother's kitchen prepare the chili on Thursday night. The results are judged quickly on Friday before everyone digs in. Blacks share soul food with us on some days. Even the black students had a surprise, however, on the day "cush-cush" was served. The dish is mentioned in several places, among them *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, an outside reading selected by

one student. "Cush-cush" is corn meal mush and it was eaten like a cereal. Students were reluctant to try it, but they decided they should just to get the feeling of life during the times of slavery. A little brown sugar and butter had some banging their spoons on their bowls for more while others decided that one serving was one too many. A large toastmaster oven and an electric skillet take care of most heating needs. Incidentally, Zane Grey novels are filled with cooking and recipes.

Walking trips are a popular Friday activity. The community, and probably any community, is blessed with a few senior citizens who live very near the school. They are happy to have a group of young people sit on their front porches for about twenty minutes or so while they reminisce about their lives in the Southwest. One lady who grew up in Oklahoma in Osage country before the area became a state charmed the students with tales of her early life on a ranch where her only companions were cowboys and Indians. She served water from a gourd dipper and let the students enjoy the mementos in her home. She died just this past summer and she is sorely missed by the students, her friends. The local rest home is only two blocks away. One group reading *The Grapes of Wrath* visited on two successive Fridays, taking pen and paper to record some of the resident's recollections of the Depression. The oral history was put into final form retaining the flavor of the speech patterns as much as possible and placed in the library as part of a permanent collection of oral history gathered by students of Southwest literature.

Sometimes the field trips are made literally to the field behind the stadium and particularly the ditches which skirt the outside of the high school campus. Students discoved that one form of native grass still grows here. Mockingbirds and hawks are there too. At several old homes skirting the campus the students discovered bearing mulberry trees (we fought the birds for our share), native pecan trees (tiny nuts which were only dug out with great effort and later put into a cake), and plants dating back to the past. The ditches also yielded wild onions, grape vines, and gourds. All were transported to the classroom and put to use.

Guitar, banjo, mandolin, or violin playing is introduced on some Fridays. Only a few participate and try to learn to play, but the students do not lack enthusiasm. Occasionally a group gets good enough to entertain at assembly programs. Fridays are the best days, no doubt about it. If Fridays appear to be filled with more folklore than literature, I plead guilty.

Southwest literature is adaptable to the basic, regular, and honors level. Basic students, those whose reading and grammar skills are so low that they cannot function in a regular class, enjoy the fast, action packed plot of many Westerns whose heroes and heroines are long on skill and short on introspection. Cowboy lingo, where *ain't* is acceptable, easy vocabulary and uncomplicated syntax appeal to the basic student. The group reads Zane Grey and Louis L'Amour books literally by the dozens. They find the works of Stuart Edward White readable and the stories of Dorothy Johnson get some interest, especially the stories which have been made into movies such as *The Hanging Tree* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Grammar skills, spelling and vocabulary studies are as easy to pull from Southwestern novels as from any other sources of literature. While most thinking English teachers will frown on a steady diet of Louis L'Amour and Zane Grey, it does need to be said that students who reject traditional literature will read Southwestern literature.

Basic students often have a poor self image. They see themselves as less than bright stars in the school environment, but perceive themselves long on common sense, survivors against a fast paced world, handy with fists, and proficient speakers of the vocabulary of the gutter. It could be that they see the heroes and heroines of Grey and L'Amour as reflections of their own images and that they are reading about people like themselves.

Students in the regular level classes respond to much more than the pulp Westerns, in spite of their sometimes getting hooked on Grey and L'Amour. The reading selection is broader and, frankly, copious: Dorothy Johnson, Elmer Kelton, Benjamin Capps, Conrad Richter, Robert Flynn, Frank Waters, Oliver LaFarge, Paul Horgan, Ben Green, Frank Dobie, W.P. Webb and C.L. Sonnichsen supply good non-fiction.

The honors level of Southwest Literature is a steady diet of pure enjoyment. The reading of *Red Sky at Morning*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Man Who Killed the Deer* and *The Ox-Bow Incident*, *Great River*, *The Great Plains*, and *Tularosa* are selections which ask the students not only to read mature literature but also to understand the major ethnic groups living in the Southwest. All tests are essay tests. The final six weeks of the semester is devoted to a paper, in length ten to fifteen pages, of literary criticism synthesizing as many as four of the works studied. The paper is written entirely in class so that supervision and help are near. Each class member has a partner to consult for proofreading, getting ideas, and serving as a sounding board. Time spent writing the paper is not a quiet six weeks. With at least half of the class giving advice, hurrying to the library for material to prove a point, hammering out lead-in sentences, arguing about major points, or fighting for the dictionary, the classroom atmosphere reminds one of a newsroom. I do not hold up the method as a good example for teaching writing. However, it does work for my classes and gives the students more confidence in their ability to write than some other methods. The papers produced in class are of high quality most of the time.

Poetry studied in the honors classes includes the recent works of Betsy Colquitt as well as the poetry in *Signature of the Sun* by Major and Pierce. The plays of Preston Jones offer valuable reading. The use of Southwestern themes was pursued in the honors level of Creative Writing last spring. The results produced the first and second place winners in Texas Christian University's creative writing competition and won for the students scholarships worth over five hundred dollars to the Gifted Students Institute this past summer.

In spite of my enthusiasm for Southwest literature, I am not unaware of criticism. The most stinging question raised is "How can you compare any piece of Southwestern literature with the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, the English Romantics, and dozens of other pieces of fine literature from both England and America?" The answer is that I cannot compare them and never thought about trying. Southwest Literature does not replace any reading, but rather extends it into other worlds which Chaucer and Shakespeare would have applauded—the world of cows, oil, politics, wider horizons, sun, brutal winds, drum beats, hoof beats, saddle leather, castanets, silence, chanting in the deserts, death in the night, love out on the lone prairie.

Yes, I am a teacher of Southwest literature. When you call me that, smile!

Douglas M. Brooks
Terry O. Phelps
The University of Texas at Arlington

Motivating Adolescents to Read: A High Interest Approach

Who among us has not gazed into the tombstone eyes of adolescent English students just asked the question "Who read the poem I assigned for homework?" The silence is deafening. Students' eyes drift toward the floor or ceiling. The teacher is left with the chore of recounting the poem, offering interpretations and insights, all the while prodding and probing unsuccessfully for discussion. By seventh period the teacher begins to wonder: "Do the students just hate literature?" For many students the answer is "Yes." They have been conditioned by years of reading poems about daffodils and skylarks to think of literature as obscure, hum-drum stuff that only an English teacher could love. A useful question for the literature teacher to ask him/herself is "What got me interested in literature when I was a youngster?" The answer to that question might lead to the following high-interest approach to teaching literature.

The most critical aspect of teaching literature is the selection of the material to be read. Someone may immediately object, "But we have to use the textbooks in our schools." How many schools mandate what selections must be read from textbooks? How many schools prohibit teachers from including supplementary material for reading? Most teachers have more latitude in selecting literature than they might imagine. Freed from the compulsion to follow the book, the teacher can focus on two crucial criteria for selection of works for students to read: interest and appropriateness.

Let's face it: most adolescents are not going to get excited about many of the "classics" found in their literature books. The teacher who insists on force-feeding them is merely going to make such works more repugnant to students. This is not to say that teachers should abandon fine literature in favor of sentimental drivel and cheap adventure. No, it is to suggest that some works in textbooks, as well as in other sources, will have more immediate appeal because they parallel the current interests of adolescents. Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, for example, may interest boys because of its theme of developing manhood. Likewise, Wordsworth's suggestion to "quit your books" in "The Tables Turned" is apt to draw cheers from students who feel themselves beleaguered with studies. The personal experience of the adolescent is the energy source which will make content come alive, so the teacher is wise to capitalize on that experience.

Inherent in any assessment of interest is an evaluation of appropriateness for the particular level of students. Beyond the obvious considerations of vocabulary and syntax (primary components of most readability indices) a major concern should be the cognitive level required by a piece of literature. Developmental research has demonstrated that the majority of secondary school children have limited ability to reason with abstraction; therefore, many students find it impossible to maintain interest in, say, poetry with its levels of meaning, no matter how initially interesting the theme. Such works can be studied with sustained interest only if the teacher works within the confines of the students' abilities. In other words, the English teacher who has chosen that profession largely because of a love for delving into the deeper meanings of literature may have to forego some of her/his more abstract explorations in class to avoid alienating the majority of students who cannot comprehend.

Once the teacher has identified an appropriate, interesting work, he/she has a hook which still must be baited. For example, Poe's "The Telltale Heart" may have an ideal theme for adolescents: guilt and how conscience traps and occasionally identifies the guilty. Is there an adolescent alive who has not done something she/he felt guilty about, tried to conceal the error, and ultimately confessed the crime? An excellent hook, but how will students know until they read the story? It is up to the teacher to "prick the sides" of students' interest by introducing the theme that parallels their experience. "Have any of you ever done something you felt guilty about?" says the teacher about to embark on "The Telltale Heart." A student may or may not want to share some experience with the class (but almost inevitably someone will), yet just thinking about it may get him/her involved in the story. "Did your guilt give you away?" "Did your conscience bother you to the point of confession?" Questions such as these can stimulate a much livelier discussion than the biography of most authors.

Once students have become interested in a work, it is much easier to move on to other aspects of that work by tying them to the theme that initiated interest, asking questions about the relationship of style, structure, etc., to that theme (e.g., "What characteristics of the author's style helped convey this melancholy theme?").

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